

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6793
INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
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USLO PEKING

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 5724

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SN
SUBJECT: CHINESE CHAUVINISM AS A CAMPAIGN TACTIC IN SINGAPORE

REF: A) SINGAPORE A-125 B) SINGAPORE A-140
C) 75 SINGAPORE A-77 D) SINGAPORE 0384 OF 1/29/73 (NOTAL)

1. LEE KUAN YEW RECEIVED BANNER HEADLINES IN DECEMBER 21 STRAITS TIMES WHEN HE WARNED THAT HE WILL "SMACK" ANYONE INCITING CHINESE CHAUVINISM. STATING THAT THE "HOARY" QUESTION OF THE GOVERNMENT "KILLING" CHINESE EDUCATION HAD BEEN RAISED BY THE OPPOSITION, LEE TOLD A DECMEMBER 20 NOONTIME ELECTION RALLY THAT IF "YOU PLAY CHINESE CHAUVINISM, I SMACK YOU BECAUSE IT CAN LEAD TO BLOODSHED". ASSERTING THAT UNITED FRONT CANDIDATE SHAMSUDDIN TUNG "HAD GONE OUT ON BEHALF OF (FORMER NANYANG SIAN PAU EDITOR-IN-CHIEF) LEE EU SENG," LEE THREATENED "THEY TRANSGRESS THE KNOWN RULES OF THE LAW...THEY WILL BE ASKED TO EXPLAIN." (THE CHINESE PRESS MENTIONED LEE'S STATEMENT IN THE BODY OF THEIR ARTICLES ON HIS SPEECH, WITHOUT SPECIAL EMPHASIS OR COMMENT.)

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2. BY INVOKING THE EXAMPLE OF LEE EU SENG, LEE KUAN YEW IS CLEARLY THREATENING WITH LEGAL ACTION AND/OR DETENTION OPPOSITION POLITICIANS WHO RAISE CHINESE ETHNIC ISSUES. AS MENTIONED IN REF A, LEE EU SENG, MILLIONAIRE PUBLISHER, AND A LEADER OF THE HOKKIEN COMMUNITY, HAS

BEEN DETAINED SINCE EARLY 1973 BECAUSE HIS PUBLICATION OF CHINESE-ORIENTED ISSUES ALLEGEDLY HAD POTENTIAL FOR INFLAMING PUBLIC OPINION. TUNG, IN A CAMPAIGN STATEMENT (NOT AVAILABLE TO THE EMBASSY) HAD APPARENTLY GONE TOO FAR IN THE VIEW OF LEE KUAN YEW.

3. ENGLISH VERSUS CHINESE EDUCATION HAS ALWAYS EVOKED SOME PUBLIC PASSION IN SINGAPORE, WITH ALL ITS IMPLICATIONS IN TERMS OF CULTURAL BACKGROUND, NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION, COMMUNITY COHERENCE, AND POLITICAL ALLEGIANCE. THE PAP'S INABILITY TO RESOLVE THIS CONUNDRUM HAS ENGENDERED A MUTED DISSATISFACTION AMONG THE CHINESE-EDUCATED COMMUNITY (REF B, REF C). WHILE AWARE OF THIS DISCONTENT, THE PAP IS AFRAID TO GIVE VENT TO THIS FRUSTRATION, BECAUSE OF MEMORIES OF THE EXTREMIST VIOLENCE OF THE 1950'S. LEE KUAN YEW'S STATEMENT, WHILE HARSH, MAY NOT PRESAGE ACTION AGAINST TUNG. HOWEVER, HIS WORDS SHOULD REMIND THE OPPOSITION OF THE LIMITS OF HIS TOLERANCE. PERHAPS TO TEST THESE LIMITS, UNITED FRONT CANDIDATE WONG KUI YU SUBSEQUENTLY STATED (AS REPORTED IN NEW NATION (NN) OF DECEMBER 21) THAT HE WAS ASHAMED OF LEE KUAN YEW FOR HAVING MADE CHINESE A SECOND LANGUAGE. WONG WAS QUOTED BY NN AS SAYING "WE WANT OUR OWN MOTHER TONGUE TO BE THE FIRST LANGUAGE AND NOT ENGLISH". PARENTHETICALLY, WONG AT THE SAME TIME ACCUSED THE PAP OF BEING DEPENDENT ON FOREIGN POWERS; WITH THE BRITISH HAVING BEEN REDUCED TO ECONOMIC IMPOTENCE "THEY (THE PAP) TRY TO BE FRIENDLY WITH THE U.S."

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4. RESPONDING TO LEE KUAN YEW'S THREAT, TUNG HAS DENIED RAISING THE QUESTION OF PAP "KILLING" CHINESE EDUCATION. IN DECEMBER 22 STRAITS TIMES, TUNG WAS QUOTED AS SAYING "I MERELY SAID THAT THE LEARNING OF ONE'S MOTHER TONGUE SHOULD BE THE BIRTHRIGHT OF EVERY CITIZEN." I HAVE NO INTENTION OF AROUSING COMMUNAL FEELINGS IN SINGAPORE BUT THIS ISSUE HAS BEEN TWISTED BY MR. LEE."

5. EMBASSY BELIEVES IT MOST UNLIKELY THAT TUNG, A FERVENT MUSLIM, IS A DANGEROUS CHINESE CHAUVINIST, NOTWITHSTANDING LEE KUAN YEW'S ALLEGATION THAT TUNG HAD COOPERATED "WITH LEE EU SENG TO CAUSE RACIAL TROUBLE HERE." TUNG'S EXPLANATION FOR RE-ENTERING POLITICS, CARRIED IN DECEMBER 22 PRESS, SEEMS STRAIGHTFORWARD ENOUGH. HE AVERRERD THAT AFTER LEE EU SENG'S DETENTION "RUMORS (WENT) AROUND THAT I (TUNG) HAD BETRAYED MY FORMER BOSS,... AND THE PAPER I WORKED FOR. THIS WAS BECAUSE LEE WAS DETAINED AFTER MY RELEASE. I FELT VERY

UNHAPPY...AS THERE WAS NO WAY I COULD EXPLAIN THIS TO
THE PEOPLE. NOW THE ELECTION RALLIES WOULD GIVE ME THE
OPPORTUNITY." NEVERTHELESS, THIS EPISODE HAS RESURRECTED
THE EMOTIONAL ATMOSPHERE OF THE 1973 NANYANG SIANG PAU
CRISIS (REF D).
HOLDRIDGE

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NNN

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